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CHAPTER V

Family

The family among the Georgian Highlanders represents an exogamous social unit which is patrilineal in descent, and patrilocal.

The form and composition of the family is not the same among the different groups of Georgian Highlanders. Among the Khevsurs, who leave the parental home at once after marriage, the family consists usually of a married couple and their children. Among the Pshavs, who are not partisans of division, the married brothers and their aged parents often live together, forming large families, which may be regarded as a remnant of the joint-family which was present in the whole Georgian Kingdom in time past. The same phenomenon is to be found also among the Svans, where individual brothers live together, forming a large homestead.

The father is the head of the family. In times past, the father was not only the head in the economic life of the family, but he was also its spiritual leader. The center of the home worship was the house hearth. The hearth and the iron chain suspended over it, called *sakideli*, and fire in general, were believed to be endowed with special supernatural power. On these beliefs are founded customs regarding fire as a cleansing and purifying agent, and the walking around the hearth during the wedding ceremony of the Pshavs.[1] The wife and children are subordinate to the father, obeying all his orders. His power and his rights over his children are manifested especially in the marriage procedures, where parental approval was necessary; most of the business of choosing the bride, matchmaking and bethrothal are accomplished by the parents without asking the consent of the young people. The power of the father is greater among the Svans than among the other groups of Georgian Highlanders. It is clearly expressed in the custom of infanticide which was practiced formerly in

[1] See Chapter VI, on Marriage.

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791 animals, he usually selects the best breed known in the community.
326 If after consultation with the blacksmith and presentation of the offering the sick man recovers, the result is fame and new presents and offerings to the blacksmith and his anvil; but in the event the man dies, the explanation is that the relatives of the sick person did not know how to appease the anvil, or they did not apply to the right blacksmith's shop and anvil, as it should have been, etc. These superstitious beliefs of the people give to the blacksmiths, besides the profits mentioned, a further advantage in that they may keep the doors of their homes and shops wide open during the day or night without fear of having their property stolen, despite the fact that the people are not very strict in the proper interpretation of the words "mine" and "thine."

[17] Beliefs similar to those just described concerning the supernatural power of iron are found among other peoples of the Caucasus. For example, the Circassians have a special deity, the protector of blacksmiths, called *Tliebse,* about whom M. Taitbout de Marigny[39] relates that "le jour de sa fete, on fait, en son honneur, des libations sur un soc et une hache. . . ."

783 Besides using iron as a protective power against evil creatures,
843 the people use fire also. Thus the Georgians of Imerethi[40]
372 believe that the evil being of the woods, called *chinka,* is afraid of the fire. In the evening, no one is permitted to enter the room of a pregnant woman without previously warming himself before the fire in the fire-place. If one neglects to take this precaution, the evil spirit may follow the newcomer into the room and drive the woman mad.

Among the Georgians of Meskhethi,[41] if a traveler comes at night into a house where there is a woman with child, he must first cleanse himself of the evil spirit (*avi suli*) who may otherwise enter the room with him. In order to avoid this danger and to cleanse the traveler, he is required to jump over a burning pile and allow himself to be sprinkled with holy water.

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[39] Taitbout de Marigny: b, 309.
[40] Mashurko: 369.
[41] Khakhanov: b, 11.